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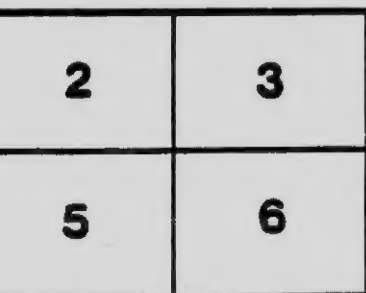
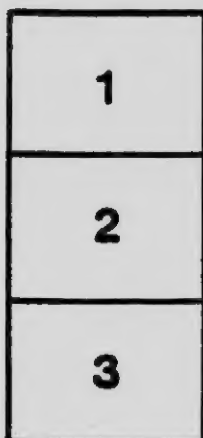
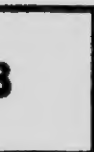
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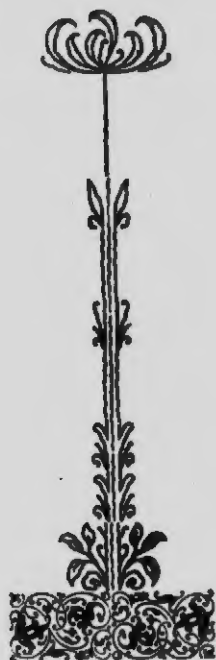
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**Our French
Work**



BY
REV. E. B. RYCKMAN, D.D.

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Rev. E. B. Ryckman, M.A., D.D.

OUR FRENCH WORK.

AT a meeting of the Executive of the Board of Missions in February last, when our French Work was under discussion, a member asked the question, whether that work was worth what it cost. As to that question this was not the first time of asking. It had often been asked, and as often answered. But either because the answers have been unsatisfactory, or because they have not reached the persons interested in the subject, the question still recurs, Are the French Missions worth what they cost? Do the results justify the expenditure? After a brief conversation the Executive resolved: "That it is desirable that a report on the whole subject of the French Missions be laid before this Committee, and that the speaker, Dr. Ryckman, be requested to prepare it."

Our French Work

Rev. E. B. Ryckman, D.D.

The Field

† T is now just fifty years since our Missionary Society laid its hand to this work of French evangelization. In 1855 our first mission was opened in the city of Quebec. Francois Pepin was the first missionary. The Mission was sustained for twelve years. In 1867 it was discontinued. It had never reported more than twenty members. In its closing hours it claimed to have twelve. No second attempt has been made to plant a mission in that city.

The next year, 1856, a mission was begun at Roxton, which prospered fairly for a long time, but for several years past steadily declined, and last Conference reported no members, and no missionary was stationed there.

A mission was not organized in Montreal until 1861. It is there that the best work seems to have been done.

From first to last our missionaries have labored in forty-four localities or appointments. Of these twenty-five have been simply discontinued on account of utter failure of success. Several others though not complete failures, became so small and weak as to be absorbed in neighboring stations, and now, at this day, there are only five remaining, if Roxton be discontinued—Montreal Centre, Montreal West, and St. Jovite on the Montreal District, Actonvale on the Waterloo District, and St. Philippe de Chester on the Quebec District.

The Laborers

In this field there have been employed altogether a force of thirty-four missionaries. The great majority of these put in very brief terms of service; some dropping the work almost as soon as they had begun it; some proving in a short time unsuitable to us, and many others leaving for better fields in the United States. Not more than one-half dozen of them all served so long a



REV. EDWARD DE GRUCHY,

Pastor Montreal Centre French Methodist Church.

period as fifteen years. Our Bro. De Gruchy, in Montreal, still efficient, carries the honor of the longest period—thirty years; A. Parent, superannuated now for fifteen years, gave thirty-three of service; J. A. Dorion, deceased, twenty-eight years; T. Charbonnel, twenty-four years; L. Massicotte, still

effective, nineteen years; and L. Roy, in the United States, fifteen; of the remainder, twenty-one served six years or less, the great majority of these only two or three years. No doubt, those who were in charge of the missions put forth their best wisdom and energy to secure proper agents for this work, but with such transient workers, many of whom showed their entire inefficiency in the course of two or three years, it could not be expected that the cause would greatly prosper; and yet the Society has had to bear the expense year by year of all these inexperienced, unsuitable and unsteady workers. The force is now reduced to five, and two of these are without experience, education or influence.

The Results

What has been accomplished during these fifty years, on all this ground, by this small army of missionaries?

The work began in 1855. In 1856 no members were reported. In 1857 Roxton reported twenty-one—the first returns were made in 1858, Roxton and Farnham, a total of thirty-three; in 1859, Roxton, Stanstead and St. Armands, fifty-four; and in 1860 there was a return of one hundred and two, a very good beginning. Ten years later, in 1870, there was a record of only forty members. Almost to a certainty the record was carelessly made and incomplete, for in 1873, one hundred and thirty-seven were reported—a gain, we will say, of thirty-five in the decade. In 1880 there were four hundred and eighty-one members. In the previous year, 1879, high water mark was reached when the number was 498—the largest return ever made in the history of these missions. Yet there is every reason to believe that that encouraging report was, if not fictitious, unsound. There was at that time, among the missionaries, a man who was accustomed to return from sixty to

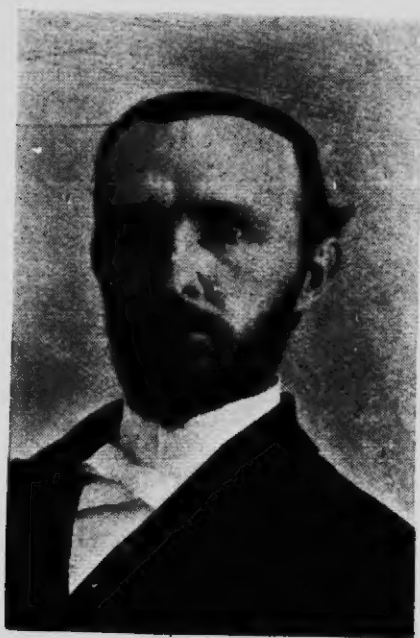
one hundred and forty members, when all his brethren were puzzled to know how he made up his figures. Two years later, in 1882, this brother withdrew from the church, and, in 1883, the return of French members dropped suddenly to two hundred and forty-five—an apparent decrease of two hundred and forty-three in three years. In 1890, the number of members was 209—a decrease in the decade of thirty-six. In 1900 there was a report of 271—an increase in that decade—1890-1900—of sixty-two. In the Minutes of the Montreal Conference for 1905, the number of members on our French Missions is stated at 212—another decrease in five years of fifty-nine, being sixty-two less than we had twenty-seven years ago. That is, choosing for the purpose of a fair comparison, the year 1878, before the time of the inflation, for if it were 1879 or 1880, the comparison would be still more unfavorable. So far then as the naked figures, as they have been gathered from the books, indicate the success of this Missionary Society in French evangelization, here they are, without, as yet, any attempt to account for either the smallness of the numbers, or for their fluctuations from time to time.

The Cost

To answer the question that I have undertaken to deal with, it is necessary to count the cost at which this work has been sustained. It is impossible with the incomplete data at hand to give the exact amount, therefore I attempt only an approximation, which, after all, may be pretty close, and rather under than over the actual figure. I had not the Missionary Reports from 1856, therefore have taken the years that mark the decades. These are not high record years, nor special in any sense, and hence will help us to a just average.

The grant to French Missions in 1860 was \$1,290 for three missions. I mul-

tiply that by four for the preceding years, for the work and the expense began in 1855, and from 1857 there were three missions. Then up to 1860 the grants amounted to \$5,160. In 1870 the grants were \$1,130—a decrease. The total for that decade would be \$11,300. In 1880 the grant was \$5,222. This was throughout a decade of great enlargement and expense, for from 1870 the French work was placed in charge of Rev. John Borland, who devoted all his



REV. L. MASSICOTTE, S.T.L.

Pastor French Methodist Mission, Actonvale, Que.

energies to make it succeed, and insisted upon generous supplies—more men and more money. The sum total then would be \$52,000—say \$50,000 for the ten years. Again, the decade 1880-1890 would be an expense of \$58,000, leaving out all expenses connected with the French Institute, which began during this decade to draw heavily on the funds of this Society, its share being in 1890 \$30,000. In the next decade up to 1900 there was a falling off in the work and the expense

was less ; but computing in the same way, and making due allowances, the expenditure on account of evangelistic work would be \$36,000. Now, finally, the expense for the French Work for the year 1903-4 was \$4,955, say \$5,000 ; it would then amount to \$20,000 for the first four years of the current decade. Putting these averages together, they reach the grand total for the enterprise in which this Society has been engaged for the past half-century, of \$180,460.

Over against this expenditure there is no effort to speak of in the way of financial returns from these missions. Only the best of them have at any time contributed even a little towards the support of the missionary ; a trifle is given by most of them year by year to the General Missionary Fund, and to the other Connexional funds, nothing.

So then, at the present time this Society is carrying on its operations among the French-Canadians at five points through the agency of five feeble men—feeble in the same respects as the Apostles were ; without a country, for they are regarded as having denationalized themselves ; without home, without wealth or outside influence, without friends, almost without friendship ; despised, ostracised, the whole force of public opinion, the whole sweep of social sympathy, against them ; but they achieve no such results as were wrought out in the weakness of the Apostolic period. Like the Apostles they lift themselves up against a powerful priesthood and a long-established system of faith and service, but they do not prevail as did the Apostles. They labor in obscure places mostly ; they attract no attention, they scarcely arouse opposition ; they are a little few against vast majorities, solitary amidst crowds. In such circumstances no wonder that progress, if any, should be slow ; and no wonder that the question should recur,

The Work has its Problems

Should not these funds be employed in more fruitful efforts somewhere else?

The question would be answered instantly in favor of discontinuance if these external facts which have been mentioned—the numbers of missions and missionaries, and communicants and dollars—were the only facts in the case but they are not.

1. Other Protestant churches engaged in the work of French evangelization have over and over and anxiously considered this same question, for they have had the same difficulties and discouragements. The Church of England and the



REV. W. T. HALPENNY, M.A.

Pastor DeLisle Street French Methodist Church,
Montreal.

Baptist Church have both narrowed considerably their spheres of operation. They also have failed comparatively in evangelization, and are confining themselves practically to education. The Presbyterians are doing much more than any other church, simply because they employ more laborers and spend much more money. They also are bending their efforts chiefly to increase the usefulness of their educational institutions. In the work of evangelization they are doing just what we are, namely, holding their own, barely that. So far as I have

learned none of the churches are thinking of withdrawing from the effort.

2. That the work of God is at a standstill is not characteristic of the French missions only. We have missions, not only in Quebec, but in Ontario, also, that are not advancing. It is as true of missions among English-speaking people in the Eastern townships, and in other parts of Quebec, as it is of the French missions, that they are declining. The causes may be different, but the effect is the same.

3. Examine that part of our work that is not missionary. Take up the combined Minutes. Open on the tables of membership in any Conference. Take any district as it may happen, run your eye along those parallel lines of increase and decrease, and notice how the figures keep abreast of each other, and how many of the circuits that have none of the hindrances that beset the French missions report no increase. We are not thinking of giving up the work. The causes which operate to produce this state of stagnation, if I may so term it, in Ontario, are active in Quebec. Interest in religious matters generally seems to have ebbed. There exists to-day great indifference on the part of the outside world, and apathy in the church. The secularity of the times is appalling. Mammon and politics engage men's attention more than religion. Should we be utterly discouraged if the French missions languish?

Real Value of

these

Missions

Furthermore, briefly, it is affirmed that these French missions are worth more than they seem to be on a superficial examination, for

1. The returns in the Annual Minutes include only adult communicants, and not children nor adherents, of whom there is a considerable number.

2. That Canadian Catholics embracing Protestantism find themselves in circumstances that require them to leave the

community where they are known, many of them going to the United States. I have been told by one well informed that in the country to the south of us there are fully a hundred French missions composed largely of converts from Canada.

3. That in Quebec, wherever there are Protestant missions, the public mind is continually changing favorably to Protestantism. The old animosity is immeasurably disappearing. It might remain a question whether that is not simply because the enemy is seen to be too weak to be feared, and therefore may be ignored or even tolerated; but the fact remains that the separation between Protestant and Catholic neighbors is not so wide and bitter as formerly. Increasing numbers of Roman Catholics admit that Protestantism is a good religion, and that Protestants may be Christians, just as we admit publicly that the Roman Catholic Church has a gospel, and that Roman Catholics, as such, may be saved. That is to say, the influence of the Protestant Churches, of which Methodism is one, in the Province of Quebec, is to diffuse the true light and elevate the faith, charity, morals and intelligence of the whole people. And this is a very important mission.

Colportage

During all these years, and in all this work, neither this Society nor its agents have been wanting in effort, nor in persistency. Various modes of attack on the Roman superstition have been tried, and various methods of working adopted. Colportage has been attended at the expense of thousands of dollars, but always, so far as I have seen, or can ascertain, with very little positive, practical result. Two good men were employed for many years in Montreal, at \$300 each a year, and when chairman of that district in 1894, and had that matter within my purview, I felt that I could not recommend the continuance of the

grant, because their work seemed to me so entirely nugatory and useless.

A plan of colportage has recently come to the Mission Rooms, asking for approval and support—a covered waggon for two horses, with sleeping accommodations, manned by two men capable of preaching as well as selling books, provided with a magic lantern and suitable views, for the purpose of illustrating the Gospel at evening meetings. The Baptists, it is said, are using this method in the Ottawa Valley, with what success I have not learned, and the Presbyterians have approved of the plan, but have not put it in operation. If we were disposed to take up such work we lack the men.



DELISSIE STREET FRENCH METHODIST CHURCH
AND PARSONAGE, MONTREAL.

We cannot take missionaries from their stations, nor teachers from the schools, to act as colporteurs, while not all of our stations at the present time are supplied.

Other Methods

Our missionaries in Montreal are now earnestly advocating the plan of appealing to new communities, as distinguished from the "old-established French settlements," and endeavoring to get a footing among them. As, for instance, our missionaries have visited a little community on Lake Gorman, in Northern Quebec, and propose to plant, if possible, a new

mission there. But that little settlement consists of only a dozen families, and is one hundred miles distant from the nearest missionary, who could visit it only a few times during the year, and that at an expense of from ten to fifteen dollars a trip. In such enterprises, it seems to me, there is but slender promise of permanent gain.

Another method of evangelism is the opening in towns and cities of popular



REV. PAUL VILLARD,

Principal French Methodist Institute, Montreal.

mission halls, with frequent religious services and preaching of the Gospel. This is the method by which the McAll Mission in Paris has accomplished its remarkable work. But there is a wide difference between Paris and Montreal or Quebec. In Paris the mass of the people have broken away from the control of the priests and the church, and dare

enter those halls, but amongst the French-Canadians the prohibition is absolute.

Educational Work

At the present time far the most encouraging and hopeful branch of our work among the French is the educational. We have an educational plant in Montreal which has cost us between \$55,000 and \$60,000, and is well worth to us what it has cost. This estimate does not cover the cost of alterations and im-



FRENCH METHODIST INSTITUTE, MONTREAL.

provements in the buildings, such as changes in the method of heating, and repairs from year to year. These have been very expensive. Nor does it include expenses in connection with the staff of instruction. The buildings as they stand, creditable in appearance, suitable, and in good condition, are worth so much, and are a very valuable asset of our Society.

The first grant was made to the Institute in 1881—a grant of \$500. The expense of maintaining it during 1903-4 was \$9,167, but \$3,301, the share of the Women's Missionary Society, and \$2,081, students' fees, left a burden of but \$3,805 upon the shoulders of this Society. The school is full to overflowing. It will accommodate ninety boarders, and every room is occupied. There were ninety applications for admission that could not be entertained. Many of the pupils are from Roman Catholic families. The staff are competent and earnest. Prayers, and study of the Bible and religion, are regularly observed. The moral influence of the Institute is strong, and felt by the whole body of pupils. It is one of the best and most prosperous of church schools in Quebec. It is a growing institution, and ought to be enlarged to meet the requirements of the day. It may be expected to send out Protestant and Methodist ideas through all the Province of Quebec, and to supply the church in years to come with suitable men and women to carry on the work of this Society. We cannot withdraw from a work like this.

Furthermore, on some of our missions we have our own schools, and our children are under our own care. At Actonvale, for instance, we have a regularly constituted dissentient, or Separate, School. At its late meeting the Executive of this Board was asked for aid in establishing another on the St. Philippe de Chester Mission, which aid this Board is expected to grant. If there are to be Separate Schools in our country, and if our Roman Catholic neighbors find great value in them in the way of training their children for the church, let us make full use of our privilege, when we think it advantageous to do so, and rear our young people for Protestantism and Methodism.

The True Policy

If our evangelistic work is weak, as undeniably it is, our educational work is in good position. Our policy, then, must be to push on our educational operations by every means in our power in order to more effectual evangelism. Nothing will dissipate ignorance but knowledge ; nothing will dispel darkness but light ; nothing will overcome error but truth, and the truth must prevail. The presence of the Protestant minority in the Province of Quebec has been, and is, a mighty influence on the Roman Catholic mass, as may be seen in the attitude of that church, through its highest dignitaries, against impure literature, indecent pictures and low theatres, and in favor of temperance principles and practice, and even the better observance of the Sabbath ; for these things are of Protestantism, and in Roman Catholic countries, where Protestantism has no influence, they do not exist. Then, amidst discouragements many and great, in the spirit of our brethren of other missionary societies, in the spirit of our Master, let us maintain our ground by the side of other churches, with greater faith, earnestness and liberality than ever, in the grand enterprise of disseminating a pure Gospel throughout the whole land.

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